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3 June 1985

Turner on Spying: A Mini-Dose of Carter

Secrecy and Democracy: The CIA in Transition
By Stansfield Turner
Houghton Mifflin – $16.95
304 pages
Reviewed by Tom Diaz

It is less a memoir than a criticism of bureaucratic ways of doing things and an apology for a particular credo on spying.

"Secrecy and Democracy," Adm. Stansfield Turner's rather tepid little book about his turn at the helm of the Central Intelligence Agency, doesn't tell the reader much about spies, or the Central Intelligence Agency, or what either does.

But like a passably decent high-school text on basic civics, it may serve a useful purpose by inspiring reflection on the role of the darker arts of government in a democracy that is under unrelenting assault in an undemocratic world.

Adm. Turner's name alone almost certainly guarantees that the book will sell well in the book stalls around the CIA's headquarters at Langley, Va. He is the object of fierce controversy among some who say he single-handedly destroyed the agency's ability to conduct covert operations and gather intelligence through human beings (spies), as opposed to "national technical means" (satellites and such-like).

The CIA wraps itself in so much secrecy, probably properly so, that few outside its walls can pass final judgment on the admiral's plea of "not guilty" on that particular rap.

But no matter, because the book is at heart less a personal memoir than a criticism of bureaucratic ways of doing things and an apology for a particular credo on spying. There are other, conflicting credos, but Adm. Turner fashions his in a reasonably workmanlike way, worthy of considering.

The Turner Credo is fairly simple: More congressional oversight is good for the intelligence business because it keeps it honest; the United States ought to take advantage of its technological skills to gather intelligence and should rely less on human beings to do so. And the boxes and charts that map out the existing welter of civilian and military agencies involved in intelligence functions ought to be knocked into more coordinated shape, with a czar in charge.

Despite the press hype given the book in recent weeks, "Secrecy and Democracy" takes no more than a half-dozen half-hearted swipes at the Reagan administration.

In fact, the few passages that directly assault the Reagan crew read almost as if they were spliced into the text. One can imagine an adviser (perhaps The Washington Post's Bob Woodward, who "was kind enough to read several drafts and to provide advice on the art of writing books") pulling Adm. Turner aside after having read a first draft and telling him in a polite way, "This is deadly dull stuff, Stan, and unless you throw in a punch or two, you got a loser on your hands."

The closest the book gets to red meat is a non-partisan section in which the admiral settles a few old scores with the Defense Intelligence Agency. Adm. Turner shreds what he describes as a mundane staff of castoffs and aging bureaucrats, accusing them of cranking out unimaginative analyses, caving in to the policy wishes of higher-ranking brass and thinking defensively instead of creatively.

Only those who've made their careers in the closed, byzantine world of the intelligence business know for sure whether the DIA is a pathetically laughable bureaucratic boneyard, and whether the National Security Agency (another box on the complex intelligence chart) is an arrogant runaway, as Adm. Turner charges.

But even the average reader whose only security clearance is permission from his wife for a night out on the town once a month can ponder the admiral's ruminations on how the good guys (us) can stay that way and still play intelligence hardball with the bad guys (the Soviets).

To put Adm. Turner's credo into perspective, one should recall the peculiar time and circumstances under which he was called to a duty he says he didn't want.

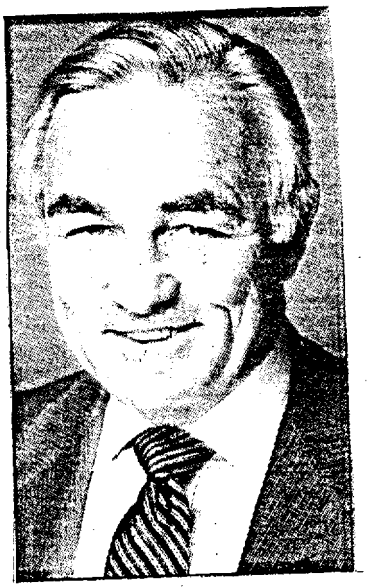
Although it is a fact now obscured by the fog of political war, the Jimmy Carter presidency, during which Adm. Turner served as director of Central Intelligence, was in one narrow way the natural evolutionary forerunner of the Reagan administration. Before other Democrats caught the scent, Mr. Carter grasped that the country had reached its limit with the federal bureaucracy.

But, although Mr. Carter excelled at describing the bloated bureaucracy as a symptom, he never grasped the problem of political philosophy that underlay the symptom.

Instead, he brought to the White House a kind of tinkerer's fascination with blueprints and gearboxes. He was fixated on "drastically reorganizing the government," as if shifting herds of bureaucrats from one box in an organization chart to another would right a ship of state that was foundering because it was overloaded.

The effort became the sickeningly sweet and singularly irritating blend one thinks of as vintage Jimmy Carter — good intentions, attention to fine detail, maddening self-righteousness, and babes-in-the-woods innocence.

One of the wizards Mr. Carter called in to shift the boxes about was Adm. Turner, whom he plucked from obscurity as commander of NATO's southern flank and appointed director of Central Intelligence, a post that included command over the Central Intelligence Agency and, theoretically at least, direction of the efforts of other arms of the multilimbed "intelligence community."



Stansfield Turner

Seen in that context, "Secrecy and Democracy" is clearly a miniaturization of the Carter formula: a dose of arguably good ideas, a sheaf of blueprints to move gearboxes and drive shafts about, all smeared over with a cloying paste of self-righteousness and a kind of wide-eyed innocence. (The innocence, one suspects, is more professed than real in the case of an old salt like Adm. Turner, a man whose career demonstrably was seasoned in hardball Pentagon politics.)

For all of that, the book is a useful articulation of one man's view of the answers to the host of important questions that have been raised in the last decade about reconciling democratic institutions with the undeniable needs of secrecy that the business of intelligence demands.

Tom Diaz covers national security affairs for The Washington Times.

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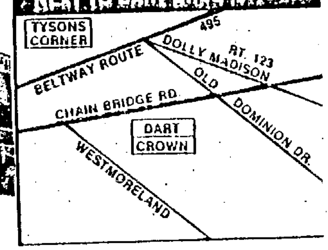

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Turner describes the dark science of espionage, the complexity of counterintelligence, the ethics of covert action, and the media's influence on the ability of intelligence agencies to act effectively. Appraising our intelligence system as the best in the world, Admiral Turner brings to light the weaknesses still apparent during the Reagan administration and makes proposals to further improve American intelligence. So remember, if you paid full price you didn't buy it at Crown Books.

NORTHAMPTON HAMPSHIRE GAZETTE (MA)
1 June 1985

Too much secrecy, says former CIA chief

By GREG FLEMMING

AMHERST — Former CIA director Stansfield Turner yesterday criticized the Reagan administration for allowing U.S. intelligence operations to again become blanketed in secrecy.

Turner accused Reagan of disrupting the balance between secrecy and openness that he tried to achieve as head of the Central Intelligence Agency under President Jimmy Carter. While intelligence work requires the classification of much information, some disclosure is needed so Congress and the public can oversee CIA activity, Turner said.

"I think the Reagan administration overlooked the importance of oversight," Turner said in a brief interview yesterday. "The balance is tipped back too far on the side of secrecy."

Turner, a member of the Amherst College class of 1945, launched a campaign to promote his book, "Secrecy and Democracy," at the Jeffery Amherst Bookshop yesterday as he autographed dozens of copies of the book. He was scheduled to sign books at the store again today starting at 11 a.m.

Turner was appointed director of the CIA in 1977 by President Carter while serving as commander of the European NATO forces. He said his term as head of the CIA forced him to deal with two "revolutions" in the field: a need for increased monitoring of intelligence operations even as newer technical systems such as highly accurate satellites were made available.

"The book is an attempt to describe the uniqueness of the period I happened to be in intelligence," he said.

Turner agreed that much about CIA activities needs to remain secret, but said Congress should at the same time be allowed to oversee intelligence operations.

"The more people you tell, the fewer secrets you keep," Turner said. "Our job in the Carter administration was to implement an oversight process that could still keep the secrets."

Turner said Congressional oversight of the CIA plays a key role in maintaining public confidence in intelligence activities and CIA officials should cut, rather than expand, the amount of information they term classified.

"That protects the rest of the information better," he said.

Those who oversee the CIA should be prepared to defend any activity they approve — even if the action becomes public and draws protest, Turner maintains in an excerpt of his book published earlier this month by Newsweek magazine.

"There is one overall test of the ethics of human intelligence activities," Turner wrote. "That is whether those approving them feel they could defend their decisions before the public if the actions became public."

Turner cited covert aid to forces seeking the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government as one of President Reagan's failures. He argued that not only do most Americans know about the aid, making it all but secret, but that most also oppose the action.

"I believe we're pursuing a policy that is a dead end," he said. "We would be better to, at least for a period of time, try something different."

Turner's book came under criticism from Reagan administration intelligence officials who ordered him not to publish names and other classified information.

Turner called the CIA censoring "arrogant and arbitrary" but said the effort did not hurt the final book. "I got into the book everything that's important, but sometimes I have to talk around the situation."

For example, Turner said he was not allowed to publish the name of a foreign intelligence service, even though the service is well-known and its name is published regularly in newspapers in that country.

"I just can't put the initials there," Turner said. "It's crazy. It doesn't protect anything."

Washington Post
20 May 1985

BOOKS

Secrecy and Democracy

A former CIA director objects strongly to the way the agency is run today.

*Adm. Stansfield Turner was commander of European NATO forces in 1977 when Annapolis classmate Jimmy Carter asked him to take over the CIA, still reeling from disclosures and investigations. A former Rhodes scholar, systems analyst, battle-zone commander and administrator, Turner shook up agency "old boys" with continuing employee cutbacks and the influx of outside experts—although his reforms did not prevent U.S. intelligence failures in Iran and Afghanistan. Today, Turner lectures, writes a monthly column and serves on several corporate boards. He recently visited Nicaragua for a firsthand view of the situation there. The following excerpt is drawn from two chapters of his new book.**

By Stansfield Turner

The Reagan administration's willingness to flout Congress repeatedly in the area of intelligence operations, such as those supporting Nicaragua's "contras," reflects a view that congressional oversight is an impediment rather than a necessity of good intelligence in a society like ours. In fact, congressional oversight has become the key to public confidence in intelligence operations. And in the long run, the public's confidence in its intelligence organizations is absolutely essential to their success. The proof of the importance of oversight is simply this: the end result of the first 30 years of American centralized intelligence without such oversight was that most human intelligence activities had come to a halt.

Why? Because errors had been made and, as is almost inevitable in our open society, disclosed. The disclosures brought such opprobrium that either Congress or the White House ordered a halt or the intelligence professionals did so on their own for fear of further condemnation. In 30 years, we simply proved that the secrecy of intelligence activities presents opportunities and temptations that require outside accountability to keep them within the bounds that our public will accept.

That the Reagan administration did not understand this was evident from a speech CIA Director William J. Casey gave to the Association of Former Intelligence Officers in October 1984. "With few exceptions, the highly publicized charges made against the CIA during the mid-'70s turned out to be false," he said. That statement may have pleased his audience, but it was inaccurate. There was much exaggeration in the media, but the record of errors is fact. Ignoring that led the Reagan team into progressively more public controversy with considerable risks for the future of our intelligence.

WILLIAM F. GENTILE—PICTURE GROUP

Turner with Nicaragua's Foreign Minister Miguel D'Escoto: A covert war

Perhaps it was because Casey's introduction to intelligence was his experience in the OSS [the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner to the CIA] of World War II when our national objective was the enemy's unconditional surrender. Almost any covert action to help win the war was considered within bounds. Translating that attitude to the peacetime 1980s was a serious mistake.

In December 1982 Rep. Edward Boland, chairman of the House intelligence committee, won approval for an amendment which prohibited the CIA from any activity intended to overthrow the government of Nicaragua. The Boland amendment was something no Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) would want. It confirmed to the world that the United States was undertaking a supposedly covert operation.

Nonetheless the contra operation expanded from a 500-man "strike team" to a major military force of 15,000 men whose mission, as described by Secretary of State George Shultz, was first interdicting arms shipments and, later, stopping the Nicaraguans from exporting revolution. But the growth of this force and the change in its mission came at the expense of growing suspicion and mistrust in the Congress.

By the middle of 1983, Boland was charging that the CIA was "almost like a rogue elephant, doing what it wanted to." The similarity between that remark and comments made during the Church Committee investigation of CIA abuses just seven years earlier was inescapable—and the sign of a distressing deterioration in the Executive-Legislative relationship on intelligence.

"It gets down to one, little, simple phrase—I am pissed off!" Senate intelligence committee chairman Barry Goldwater said in an angry letter to Casey on April 9, 1984. What infuriated him, Goldwater said, was that Casey had not told him of the CIA's extension of its covert operation to include mining Nicaragua's harbors. Whether the administration was remiss or Goldwater not alert in this situation can be argued; according to Sen. Daniel Moynihan of the Senate intelligence committee, there was only one sentence on mining in an 84-page transcript of a briefing given the committee. The bottom line is that the administration's inept handling of Congress had alienated one of its strongest supporters. Why? Because the administration had fulfilled the letter, but hardly the intent, of procedures for notifying Congress "in a timely manner" of covert operations.

Why did the mining run into such opposition that the Senate, dominated by the President's own party, voted 84 to 12 to call for its cessation? After all, the contras had been conducting other military actions against Nicaragua for some time. I believe that

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*From "Secrecy and Democracy," by Stansfield Turner, to be published by Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. Copyright 1985 by Stansfield Turner.

Congress reflected a [illegible] ment felt by much of the American public. Our ethical standards in dealing with our Central American neighbors were revealed as not what we would like to believe them to be. The world saw that we had endangered the lives and property of countries not involved with the dispute between us and Nicaragua, and that we were deliberately interfering in the internal affairs of Nicaragua to the point of undeclared war.

The Soviets, of course, have done this kind of thing routinely, especially in Eastern Europe. What embarrassed Americans was that we had stooped to the Soviets' style. Seven months earlier we had condemned the same kind of action when 241 military personnel were killed in their Beirut barracks by a truck bomb. We told the world that was "state-supported terrorism" and pointed a finger at Syria and Iran. Surely theirs was a more heinous act, but not different in kind from our supporting the people who planted mines in Nicaraguan harbors.

The mining issue was succeeded only six months later by a dispute over a manual the CIA had distributed to the contras. Some of the instructions were offensive to many Americans. One section advocated "neutralization" of Nicaraguan officials—judges and police. The term "neutralization" is generally understood to mean "assassination." This violated a standard of morality for covert action. Presidents Ford, Carter and Reagan have in their Executive Orders on intelligence specifically prohibited the CIA's carrying out assassination either directly or indirectly. The CIA was rightly accused of being out of control.

Several factors were responsible. The contras had their own objectives and style, and the levers for our control over people like this are limited. Beyond that, Nicaragua in 1981 to 1984 was not Iran of 1953 or Guatemala of 1954, where the political situation was calling out for change. Many Nicaraguans were becoming dissatisfied with the Sandinista government, but the euphoria of the 1979 revolution had far from worn off. Thus the CIA's operatives were undertaking a mission that was close to impossible, and they stretched to find additional ways to employ the contras.

That they came up with some unacceptable ones, like mining and assassination, was a result of the CIA's having recalled a large number of old covert-action warriors from the retired ranks of the CIA and the military for this task. These people were accustomed to conducting covert actions that were kept covert—not to being held accountable under congressional oversight. (I am frequently accused of having decimated the covert-action and espionage branches of the CIA by firing many of a CIA plan originated before my time; they were not nearly as extensive as often reported and they actually strengthened our espionage and covert-action capabilities.)

What's been missing in the Reagan-Casey approach is attention to the stipulation by Congress in the 1974 Hughes-Ryan amendment that covert actions must be ". . . important to the national security." It was not unreasonable for President Reagan to define as important to our security a change in situation in Nicaragua, though there were good arguments on the other side. But there is evidence that he has treated this criterion of national security cavalierly in at least two other instances. Early in his first term, while denying a press report of CIA operations in Libya, the White House for some reason stated that the country involved was actually Mauritius, at that time approaching an election. Later, the press reported a proposed covert action to unseat the government of Surinam. Covert actions in such situations hardly seem "important to the national interest."

That provision was put into the law so that we should not bypass the normal processes of government for less than important benefit. Compared with the way the rest of foreign policy is controlled by public opinion and by congressional scrutiny, there are relatively few checks on covert actions. Among other things, congressional review is done by the intelligence committees, not the foreign relations committees, and always in secret session. We don't want presidents tempted to use covert action as a way of doing things that would not pass the test of congressional or public review.

If presidents define "important" more carefully, they will not be passing up many worthwhile covert projects anyway because the environment for covert action has grown less favorable. Because of the worldwide revolution in communications, it is not nearly so easy to use political action as it was when we restored the Shah to power in 1953. Even in developing countries the public knows much more about internal affairs and world events. Politicians are more reluctant to accept covert funding from the CIA; the risks of it being found out are higher than in the past, and few politicians can afford to be accused of being puppets of the CIA. Covert propaganda is also not as effective as when there was much less information available. And even relatively small paramilitary operations can't be kept secret very long in an era of investigative reporting and dense press coverage. So covert activities of all kinds are more risky, more likely to become known and less likely to succeed.

Because of this changed environment we can expect two things from covert action in the future: first, a continuing, very limited contribution to our foreign policy from low-level activities such as propaganda, anti-terrorist actions and modest funding of democratic causes; second, an occasional very important contribution at the more controversial end of the spectrum—political or paramilitary interference.

Oversight and increased national awareness of the ethical issues involved in covert interference have restricted these latter opportunities, but we would be foolish to forsake them entirely. When the conditions are ripe, the reward can be significant. I saw a number of examples. We created a radio station to broadcast into a country that was virulently anti-American. The Voice of America reached that country, but it lacked credibility because of the volume of anti-American propaganda in the local press.

The CIA's paramilitary branch also provided overland navigation systems for Navy helicopters that made the Iranian hostage-rescue attempt feasible. These and other even more rewarding operations convinced me that the talent necessary for covert action is available in the CIA and must be preserved for significant projects. That leaves us with the need to define where covert action is appropriate.

The one overriding issue is: to what levels of ethical behavior will we stoop? The only specific guidance the intelligence community has on this question is the prohibition on assassination in three successive presidential Executive Orders. The remaining specific limitations in those orders all concern whether and how much we will intrude into the lives of Americans. That is more a matter of how much personal sacrifice our citizens are willing to make than one of ethical standards. The only other guidance on ethics is that received in specific situations from congressional oversight committees.

The absence of more specific instruction indicates that it is impossible to set absolute standards of ethics. There are, then, two schools of thought on how we should set standards. One contends that those who oversee intelligence should be free to decide ethical issues purely on the basis of what is necessary to combat the enemy. They believe that those who are well informed about the threats posed to our country should make the ethical decisions on behalf of the citizenry, not merely reflect the opinion of less informed citizens. Former CIA counterintelligence chief James Jesus Angleton epitomized the extreme of this school in 1975 when he told the Church Committee: "It is inconceivable that a secret intelligence arm of the government has to comply with all the overt orders of the government."

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says that there is one overall test of the ethics of human intelligence activities. That is whether those approving them feel they could defend their decisions before the public if the actions became public. This guideline does not say that the overseers should approve the actions only if the public would approve them if they knew of them. Rather, it says that the overseers should be so convinced of the importance of the actions that they would accept any criticism that might develop if the covert actions did become public, and could construct a convincing defense of their decisions.

cal ideals. We should never turn over custody of those ideals to any group of individuals who divorce themselves from concern for the public attitude. The crimes against mankind perpetrated by zealots who did not need to answer to the citizens are too many. Even American intelligence, operating in the past in confidence that it would not be held accountable, committed errors that both disgraced our nation and, in the longer run, imperiled our very intelligence capabilities.

An Agenda for Action

My agenda is designed both to maintain our current intelligence lead over the Soviets and keep on top of our own changing needs:

Reduce the emphasis on covert action. Covert action should be brought back from the Reagan Administration's excesses to the limits prescribed by law. The Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) himself must decide how much emphasis to place on his roles as chief intelligence officer and chief of covert operations. But he can provide unbiased intelligence judgments to the president—and Congress—only if he is not the leading advocate of covert action.

Separate the role of DCI from the head of the CIA. The more the incumbent actively runs the CIA, the more he is seen as the biased head of one of the agencies of the intelligence community. The greater effort he makes to act as the leader of the community, the more he must distance himself from the CIA, the only organization he fully controls. The solution is a separate director of national intelligence at the White House.

Improve analysis. The CIA's analytic branch tends to stifle originality, ignore outside criticism, and be more interested in immediate high-visibility issues than long-range, fundamental ones. We do not understand well enough what makes the Soviet Union react or what factors influence change over the mid-to-long term. The CIA also should have a group of analysts for each of several turbulent countries of considerable interest to us, such as the Philippines, Nigeria and Brazil. And major efforts are needed to track economic developments, terrorism, narcotics traffic and nuclear proliferation.

The Defense Intelligence Agency, with notable exceptions, is saddled with too many mediocre people and overwhelming pressure to support Pentagon programs. The Secretary of Defense should dismantle redundant Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine intelligence branches and force the services to rely on an improved DIA.

Strengthen the DCI's authority over the National Security Agency. Teamwork in collection and analysis is impeded by the NSA, our prime electronic eavesdropper, through its insistence on doing analysis—neither its mission nor forte—and withholding information from other agencies to give directly to the president.

Merge the espionage and analytic branches of the CIA. Combining the collectors and the analysts into units organized by geographical regions of the world would make for better intelligence, and is the only way to ensure that the espionage branch supports the analysts as it should.

Take more and better precautions against leaks of intelligence information. The two intelligence committees of Congress should be fused into one with strictly limited numbers of staff. We should publish all materials that can be declassified to reduce what really must be kept secret. And the president must discipline senior members of his administration who are indiscreet.

Enact a charter for the intelligence community. The principal legislation governing organization and responsibilities is 35 years old and hopelessly out of date.

Depoliticize the role of the DCI. Directors such as George Bush and William Casey and nominee Ted Sorenson were too close to partisan politics. There have been suggestions that only professional military or civilian intelligence officers be the DCI, but the president should be free to select an adviser based on personal confidence and rapport. Also, because the intelligence community is terribly resistant to change, there are times when it can be brought about only by an outsider.